

First confirmed record of Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* for Brazil

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The Oilbird *Steatornis caripensis* is a rather unusual New World Caprimulgiform and is unique in being the only nocturnal avian frugivore in the world. It occurs locally in montane northern Venezuela, and in the Andes from western Venezuela to western Bolivia, together with the tepuis of southern Venezuela, eastern Colombia, Guyana and Trinidad (Ridgely & Greenfield 2001).

Oilbirds are gregarious, with colonies occupying large dark caves, which are used both as daytime roosts and for breeding. They depart the caves at dusk, flying long distances to forage gregariously for fruit, apparently locating aromatic fruit by smell and non-aromatic fruits such as palms by sight (Snow 1962). Recent genetic analysis of Caprimulgiformes indicates that Oilbirds were the earliest to branch away from all lineages (Brumfield *et al.* 1997), with the species' closest affinities thought to be with Nyctibiidae (potoos) and Caprimulgidae (nightjars). The distinct rufous plumage and bold white spotting of the Oilbird cause it to resemble superficially the much smaller Rufous Potoo *Nyctibius bracteatus*.

On 21 May 1998 at Palmari Lodge, rio Javari, Amazonas (04°17'S, 70°17'W) the freshly dead remains of an Oilbird were found by A. Antoine-Feill S. and R. Scheiele Z., along a forest trail through virgin *terra firme*. Feather samples were collected and five feathers, a primary, two secondaries, one rectrix and a mantle feather, were deposited in the Instituto Nacional de Pesquisa da Amazonia, Manaus (INPA 447) as material evidence for this, the first confirmed Brazilian record. AW made a direct comparison of the Palmari feathers with two Venezuelan specimens at the Museu Emílio Goeldi in Belém (MPEG 33147–48) from the rio Paragua, Cerro Urutani, Bolívar. This confirmed beyond doubt that the feathers belonged to an Oilbird.

Following the discovery at Palmari, communication with local inhabitants revealed that they not only knew of the presence locally of Oilbirds, they also described the birds' plumage, habits and characteristic screaming calls. Furthermore, they informed how Oilbirds are sometimes killed on river cliffs or hollow trees, as they roost by day, later being used as torches by the community as they burn well for long periods. Historically, nestlings were collected by indigenous peoples and cooked to extract a clear, odourless oil that was used mostly for cooking or in some localities for lighting (del Hoyo *et al.* 1999).

From adjacent Peru, D. Graham (pers. comm.) has reported a recent observation of a lone Oilbird. At 2100 h on 1 January 2002 at Paucarillo Forest Reserve, Loreto (03°41'S, 72°11'W), along the rio Orosa, DG and eight other ornithologists observed an Oilbird at close quarters. The bird was observed in flight by means of

a strong spotlight beam in which it became disoriented, whereupon it flew towards the light and started to emit strong clicking sounds while it briefly flew in tight circles. The bird remained in the beam, 10–15 m above the riverbank, for c.45 seconds before flying strongly away. This Amazonian locality is c.225 km west-northwest from Palmari and on the south bank of the Amazon.

Sick (1984) was the first to report the possibility of Oilbird penetrating Brazilian territory, from occupied caves he located in 1970, in southern Venezuela close to the Brazilian frontier. During the mid 1980s, several colonies were discovered in the Venezuelan state of Bolívar, including a huge colony at Aguapira with as many as 10,000 birds. Sick (1993) included Oilbird as occurring in northern Brazil, in Roraima, because the Cerro Urutaní has been known to hold an active Oilbird colony since 1978. The cave entrance is 228 m from Brazilian territory (Dickerman & Phelps 1982). However, no sight or specimen records were available confirming the occurrence of Oilbirds in Brazil. Given this, it was highly likely that the species would be confirmed from northern Brazil, most probably from the highlands of Roraima. It was surprising, therefore, to have discovered it in the lowlands of western Amazonian Brazil.

The recent Amazonian lowland records from Brazil and Peru, in May and January, together with the comments of the local community around Palmari, strongly suggest that these occurrences in the lowlands may not refer to transitory individuals and that the species may prove to be more widespread in Amazonia.

The nearest known breeding colony to Palmari in Colombia is c.600 km to the north-northwest in the tablelands of Vaupés (Olivares 1964, Hilty & Brown 1986). Colonies in Peru (T. Schulenberg pers. comm.) are mostly from Andean foothills 800–900 km away, but a recent record from Tahuayo (08°01'S, 74°02'W), c.600 km distant, is the closest record, east across the río Ucayali. Roca (1994), using radio telemetry in Venezuela on ten Oilbirds, recorded the maximum nocturnal foraging range as 150 km, although one bird moved 240 km in a single night to another roosting cave, demonstrating that the species can cover long distances quickly. It has also been recorded as a vagrant from Tobago, Panama and Costa Rica (Cleere 1998).

We suggest that further field work in western Amazonian Brazil and adjacent Peru should aim to locate Oilbirds and confirm their status. This might reveal whether the records reported here involved an unknown lowland colony. If a breeding population does exist, we strongly recommend that new specimens and tissue samples be collected, and a thorough comparison of these materials be made with highland birds in order to evaluate whether these birds represent a new taxon.

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Rapid speciation by a Lesser Antillean endemic, Barbados Bullfinch *Loxigilla barbadensis*

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The small endemic West Indian emberizine known as the Lesser Antillean Bullfinch *Loxigilla noctis* is widespread in the Leeward and Windward Lesser Antilles (Fig. 1). It has usually been regarded as highly polytypic and nine subspecies are currently recognised (Table 1). With one exception, all are strongly sexually dichromatic: males are jet black with rufous throats, rufous or black undertail-coverts, and black bills; females are brownish-olive, paler ventrally, with horn-coloured bills.

The exception is the population found only on the isolated and geologically discrete island of Barbados. Originally described by Cory (1886) as a separate species, Barbados Bullfinch *Loxigilla barbadensis*, nearly all subsequent workers, hewing to 20th-century taxonomic practice, have treated it as another subspecies of the Lesser Antillean Bullfinch, its scientific name then becoming *Loxigilla noctis barbadensis*. However, the bullfinches resident on Barbados differ in one striking way from the other eight named populations of the Lesser Antillean Bullfinch: they exhibit no sexual dichromatism. In the light of recent treatments of other allopatric West Indian bird populations, reconsideration of the taxonomic status of *barbadensis* is warranted.